

# Safety committees

## The heart of your organization's safety efforts

Organizing or re-energizing a safety committee, whose sole purpose is to prevent injuries and accidents, can protect your business from avoidable costs that directly affect your bottom line.

A safety committee, as the heart of an organization's safety efforts, can:

- Make managers aware of production or operational safety issues.
- Help save time and money by improving everyday work activities.
- Reduce the risk of OSHA citations or other state penalties.
- Increase employees' safety awareness and knowledge.
- Enable employees to actively identify and address safety issues directly affecting them.
- Make workplace safety a more formalized and important commitment.
- Show upper management's genuine concern for employees' well-being.

### Who is required to have a safety committee?

In states not regulated by OSHA on a state level, employers are not required by law to have a safety committee. However, it is a good idea.

In states regulated by state OSHA such as Minnesota, the law requires employers with more than 25 employees to establish and administer a joint labor-management safety committee.

Employers regulated by state-level OSHA with 25 employees or fewer, you may still be required to maintain a committee, depending on your company's safety record and your industry.

### Safety committee make-up

Your safety committee should be made up of a mixed population of employees and management with representatives from both production and administration.

Preferably, employee committee members should be elected by peers, or by their collective bargaining agent. If no employees volunteer, the employer can select the employee representatives.

If your company has multiple locations that all do essentially the same thing, one committee is probably adequate. If you have multiple locations of 50 or more employees, a safety committee should be established at each one.

### Committee functions

A safety committee's basic duties should include:

- Conducting visual surveys of the workplace to identify safety and health concerns at least quarterly.
- Implementing a system to gather safety-related suggestions, and to report hazards and other information from employees.
- Conducting regularly scheduled meetings to discuss accident and illness prevention

methods, safety and health promotion, hazards noted on inspections and other pertinent subjects.

- Reviewing incidents that resulted in injury or illness as well as the “near misses” that didn’t result in injury.
- Taking action to correct the identified hazards by developing suggestions for management.
- Promoting safety and first aid training for all employees.

Companies should keep records of identified hazards and recommendations for a minimum of two years. Documentation of identified hazards, recommendations for correction, and injury reports can assure that progress is being made and that hazards are being controlled. They can also provide a basis for managing similar hazards that may arise in the future.

## **Make your safety committee as effective as possible. Avoid these top 10 mistakes.**

### **1) Roles are not clearly defined.**

A committee needs management support and guidance. A well-structured safety committee with a clear purpose and knowledgeable members who are aware of their responsibilities will be most effective. Develop a written agreement that:

- Encourages the committee to communicate with employees through posters, your organization’s website or intranet and your organization’s newsletter.
- Ensure that establishment and administration of the committee meets OSHA and other regulatory requirements.
- Clearly defines the committee’s functions as listed above.

### **2) Lack of a budget.**

Remember, having a safety committee is an investment, and consider employees’ time spent

in meetings, training and inspecting as an investment. Ensure that the committee has the tools it needs to properly inspect the workplace and to train employees to work safely. The committee may also need funds for safety or health fairs, wellness programs and other special safety activities and incentives.

### **3) Inadequate size of the committee.**

Let the size of your organization and its hazard potential determine the type and size of your committee. It is a good idea to keep the safety committee small so that every member can participate actively. The best size for a safety committee is three to seven members. However, if a job looks too big for a small group, subdivide and allocate portions of the task to subgroups.

### **4) Lack of new member training.**

New members typically do not understand the group dynamics and may be unaware of past issues that the committee has previously addressed. Bring new members up-to-speed by explaining the committee’s normal activities and providing them with copies of the minutes from previous meetings. It is beneficial to have departing committee members train new members. Members should demonstrate:

- A general understanding of technical safety and health issues.
- Familiarity of data gathering and decision-making processes.
- Experience with group dynamics and meeting participation and preparation.

### **5) No formalized meeting agenda.**

When an agenda is prepared, everyone on the committee understands the objectives for the meeting and is more likely to stay on task. When preparing for a meeting, consider:

- Reviewing the agenda at the beginning of the meeting and making changes if necessary.

- Having an announcement section as the time to mention new procedures, awards, and recent accident trends.
- Reviewing action items. Who is going to do what? When will it be done? Who is going to help them? There needs to be follow-up and closure on action items.
- Doing an evaluation at the end of the meeting.
- Planning the agenda for the next meeting before the meeting is over. Do not overload the agenda. If there are too many issues, put some on a “future list.”

## 6) Lack of follow-up.

Review assignments at the end of meetings and request status reports. Follow-up holds people accountable and ensures that good ideas are acted on.

## 7) Lack of communication.

Publicize your successes to both employees and management. Use the minutes of the meeting and your organization’s publications. Focus on positive things such as the number of safety talks completed or safety observations made. Recognize members joining or departing the committee.

## 8) Management domination.

Management commitment is key. Have members of upper management make guest appearances for kickoffs and announcements. Be

sure to communicate with them in order to maintain their support. However, management should not take over meetings and decisions. Management’s role is oversight and review of decisions or suggestions brought by the committee.

## 9) Lack of employee participation.

You want people on the committee who are interested and enthusiastic to become involved. Get all members involved and impress upon them exactly what it is that you want to do to make your workplace safer, healthier and more efficient. If members of the committee are motivated to act safely, other employees will sense that and be motivated too. Active employee involvement often reflects the level of enthusiasm shown by management.

## 10) Unable to adapt to change.

Committee members should look for new ways to do things, should be able to adapt to change, and be able to make changes. After all, the main goal of the committee is to facilitate change for the health and well-being of all employees.

If you’d like more information about organizing a safety committee or re-energizing the committee you already have, contact your SFM Loss Prevention representative for assistance at (952) 838-4200 or (800) 937-1181.

Go to the “Resource catalog” at [www.sfmic.com](http://www.sfmic.com) to find more helpful tools you can order or download.

**SFM**<sup>®</sup>  
The Work Comp Experts